

David Saul Bergman. *Unpardonable Sins*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2021.

*Unpardonable Sins* marks the literary debut of David Saul Bergman, a pseudonym for the collaboration between writers Daniel Born and Dale Suderman. It is a gritty murder mystery set in the heart of Chicago, and follows the ex-Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite preacher, John Reimer. When a young man is killed in what appears to be the most recent murder in a string of homophobic attacks, Reimer agrees to help a bereaved young woman with a story that doesn't quite add up. What begins as a simple case of pastoral counselling quickly transforms into a one-man private investigation, as Reimer's empathetic doggedness finds him hunting down the truth behind this man's death. The deeper Reimer digs, the less sense it makes, and before long he finds himself thrown headfirst into the city's dark underbelly of political corruption, attempted assassination, and gruesome violence.

Reimer walks a tightrope between the distinct worlds of detective and church leader—an unstable duality which parallels his own inner turmoil. From gay bars to the alderman's office, Reimer encounters people from countless walks of life and contends with varying understandings of sin, guilt, forgiveness, and absolution. Grappling with his own personal demons, he sees fragments of his imperfect life reflected in victims and suspects alike, along with spectres of the people and community he left behind long ago guiding and haunting him in equal measure. The novel builds a tumultuous storm of internal and external conflicts that push its protagonist to the limit of his reasoning and faith, all while still allowing him to make it to the church community potluck on time.

This difficult unity between hard-boiled detective fiction and moral-spiritual quandary lies at the center of the novel, especially as each side bleeds together into the different aspects of Reimer's life. Issues of LGBTQ+ discrimination and generational divides arise as equally at crime scenes as in church council meetings, and Reimer's profession and personal history add a philosophical layer to the standard mystery format. What role does guilt play in salvation? Are any sins truly unpardonable? Beyond the age-old question of "whodunnit," the novel offers a psychological examination of the many different shades of evil.

With Suderman's experience in queer rights activism, and Born's previous publications on cultural perspectives of guilt, both contributors bring a professional expertise that enhances the thematic layers of the novel. Their familiarity with, and passion for these topics transform what might otherwise be a two-dimensional crime backdrop into a multifaceted exploration of discrimination and shame. They provide the novel a moral depth that is interwoven with the simple entertainment of mystery itself.

References to other works, such as those by Jürgen Moltmann, James Frazer, and even John Milton, make appearances as well, further enhancing the spiritual nuance of both the plot and of Reimer's character. While the most essential intertext would be the Bible—the recurring invocation of 1 John 5:16 serving both as the book's epigraph and thematic inspiration—each textual reference hints at a larger intentionality, an overarching argument that the authors aim to make. At the same time, it is difficult to say whether prior familiarity with these texts proves beneficial, due to the brevity of their inclusions.

In fact, brevity consistently proves to be one of the novel's biggest hindrances. At just over 200 pages, it presents a colourful vision of ideas, characters, and even plot points that never seem to have enough time in the spotlight. The book is packed full of intriguing implications, references to prior events and future possibilities that have the reader grasping for more. The risk, however, in this whirlwind of world-building and overlapping plot threads, is that certain elements are left feeling redundant or rushed as they are left unresolved. The world Bergman paints is at times vivid and inviting, and at other times disjointed and wanting. From the grandmotherly Mildred volunteering at the church office, to the fast-talking pagan journalist and Jewish rabbi that make up Reimer's coffee buddies, the book continually presents a wide range of unique and engaging characters begging to be explored in more depth, only to be left abandoned in the margins. Like a photo taken just slightly out of focus, the novel delivers a glimpse of an exhilarating cultural noir, without ever quite fulfilling its potential.

Reminiscent of the long-running series by Dorothy L. Sayers, or more recently Louise Penny, *Unpardonable Sins* reads like a promising beginning. The first of the weary preacher's many adventures, each new entry slowly expanding and illuminating the lives and histories of the recurring characters.

With any luck, this will not be the last the world sees of John Reimer; yet even as a standalone novel it provides a unique perspective of both Mennonite culture and detective fiction and would be a good read for fans of religious philosophy and murder mysteries alike.

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Brian C. Brewer, editor. *T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism*. London: T&T Clark, 2022.

The *T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism* offers rich accounts of the multiplex movements and personalities seeking radical reform in 16th-century Europe. Chapters written by thirty-five established and emerging scholars focus primarily on the first 100 years of Anabaptist movements, offering an account of the polygenesis of these movements' historical contexts, practices, and beliefs.

Brian C. Brewer's editorial introduction frames the volume's four subsequent sections within a concise sketch of Anabaptist historiography. Brewer highlights two turning points in this field. First, he names early 20th-century historians' retrieval of early (primarily Swiss) Anabaptists as forerunners of contemporary religious voluntarism within a secularizing state. Second, he narrates the emerging awareness, beginning in the 1970s, of the heterogeneity of early Anabaptist movements. This heterogeneity functions as a guiding theme throughout the book. Likewise, the relationship between the varied forms of Anabaptism and the journey of secularization is a recurrent concern, both in chapters attending to early Anabaptist ethics and in the final section's sketch of North American Anabaptists and neo-Anabaptism.

Andrea Strübind's opening chapter, "The Polygenesis of the Anabaptists," sets up Part One's survey of Anabaptist origins. The subsequent ten chapters examine the disparate and varied character of these 16th-century movements for radical reform, each amply rooted in citations of primary